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ABSTRACT

Runaways have become a concern to Congress, law enforcement agencies, courts, and parents. Since running away is a juvenile offense, it has serious legal consequences for the young people involved. This publication describes one community's successful effort to divert runaways from the juvenile justice system and to strengthen services to troubled youth wherever needed, but especially at the family and community level. The organization (in Las Vegas) is a private one called Focus; it provides, initially, a drop-in and encounter group center for adolescents with home problems on drug problems. This realistic yet imaginative residential program is described from its inception in 1972 to the present date, and includes conversations with staff, public officials and runaways themselves. Local citizens and officials are beginning to realize that peer influence, guided by somebody with professional ethics, probably makes more impact on people with drug or alcohol-related problems than any traditional agency approach. (Author/PC)

ED 095459

An Adjustment to Get a Clear Image

by Bill Gang

FOCUS RUNAWAY HOSTEL

Las Vegas, Nevada

**U.S. Department of Health,
Education, and Welfare**

Office of Human Development

Office of Youth Development

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Runaways have become a national problem, of concern to Congress, law enforcement agencies, courts and last but not least, parents. Since running away is a juvenile status offense, it has serious legal consequences for the young people involved. Even more serious than the legal consequences of running away are the dangers presented by the drug pusher, the hustler, or the street thug. According to a Report (No. 93-180) of the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, testimony indicated that an estimated one million children run away each year. Testimony, also developed at the hearings before the subcommittee, linked the runaway incident to the use of dangerous drugs and to petty

theft, leading the runaway into contact with the police and the world of criminal activity.

This publication describes one community's successful effort to divert runaways from the juvenile justice system, and to strengthen services to troubled youth wherever needed, but especially at the family and community level.

This realistic, yet imaginative program, has continued support from the Governor of Nevada, State, local, public and private agencies, and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

The publication is dedicated to the memory of Flora Dungan whose vision and foresight helped make "Focus" a reality.

JAMES A. HART
Commissioner
Office of Youth Development

Las Vegas, as far as many Americans are concerned, ends just outside the edges of the neon alligator called the "Strip," peddling a billion dollars worth of rainbows with promised pots of gold.

Of course, there is also "Casino Center" in downtown Las Vegas, a three-block-long kaleidoscopic chasm of quivering light bulbs which keep that stretch several degrees hotter than the rest of the city. Carnavalesque barkers there give away everything from New Year's hats to nickels in often successful efforts to lure the traveler into this or that web of slot machines and blackjack games.

But tucked off behind all the garish, energy-soaking facades are two organizations which have been performing unprecedented razzle-dazzle with kids. The second organization is a private one called FOCUS, providing initially a drop-in and encounter group center for kids suffering problems at home or "the scourge of drug abuse." But, more to the point, FOCUS involves a pilot project runaway hostel funded for the moment through the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare's Office of Youth Development (OYD).

The theory behind the runaway hostel is elementary: Keep kids from being sucked into the juvenile

court system by giving them everything they would get through the court but on a voluntary basis. Study after study has pounded into juvenile administrator's heads that the further a youngster is dragged through the Juvenile Court structure, the better his chances are of making a return trip. Focus is a working "diversionary agency."

Nevada law reads that anyone under 18-years-old must be under the control of a responsible adult. That doesn't include Mom and Dad back in Cleveland, even if they know their 17-year-old son is traveling around the country for the summer. . . . it doesn't count unless the kid has a notarized letter from his parents, and then only maybe. For youngsters traveling with only their folks' verbal permission, this was a travesty because they used to spend at least a day locked up in the detention center. The law was designed to nail the runaways attracted to Las Vegas' bright lights like an adolescent moth to a flame. Often the results are the same—they get burned.

Ray ben David, the founder and Director of Focus, started out in Las Vegas as a Crisis Counselor at Clark County Juvenile Court Services. He was the first Crisis Counselor in Southern Nevada, and one of the first of that strange breed in the country. He dressed as he pleased, had no office and was on call 24-hours a day. He held kids' hands, patted them on their heads, kicked their rear ends or did whatever it took to get them through a crisis situation. Usually it worked.

The first kid to pull his coattail to the exploding inequities in the rules about traveling across our free country was a 17-year old boy. ben David still gets a white knuckle feeling when he thinks about the kid because he couldn't do anything to help him. The boy was sight-seeing around the United States one summer with his parents' permission, and got picked up in Las Vegas as an out-of-town run-away. "Not only did he have his folk's permission," ben David said, "but his father slapped him on the back and said, 'I think it's great that you can travel and see the country. Go ahead, I did it when I was a kid.'"

"And we threw him in lock-up," he continued.

"I was the only guy who could really talk to the kid," ben David recalled. "Up to a point I could talk to him. I remember going into his room where he was locked in and he looked at me with a sardonic smile as if to say, 'Okay, what have you got for me today and will you explain why I am here.'"

"Eventually we contacted his folks, who were away for the weekend, and they went up in the air," he said.

"How dare you!" they bellowed. "We're going to sue you! Turn our son loose!"

The boy was released from the detention center but, as the law dictated, he still had to be put on a plane back home.

"He was an intelligent kid, but I'll bet money he turned around the other way—mad, hostile at society," ben David said. "In a way I can't blame him. We disrupted his plans. We treated him like a criminal. We took away his freedom. This kid was walking around saying, 'I am an American citizen. I can walk around anyplace.' We wouldn't let him."

But, probably the greatest reason Southern Nevada is so packed full of runaways is because it is between Southern California and almost anywhere else in the country. Thousands of out-of-town runaways, or



O.J.'s (other jurisdiction) as Juvenile Court Services likes to call them pass through Las Vegas each year and more than a thousand are snatched up by the police. In the old days they would be locked up until their parents gathered together enough money for plane or bus tickets home and wired it to Las Vegas. Usually the kids would spend the entire time locked up in their cells with little more than a bad novel to keep them from continually counting the rivets in the big steel doors. Most local burglars and auto thieves got out of detention faster than O.J.'s.

Local runaways had it a little better but the badge of delinquency was still pinned to the kids' foreheads. There are more than a few youngsters—especially girls—doing time in Nevada's youth institutions for performing no other sin than running away from what they perceive to be a bad home life. For most, it's a matter of trading a bad home for an institutional education in big-time law breaking. When the youth gets out, he finds nothing has changed at home. The same deep-rooted feelings and hostile attitudes which caused him to run away are

still there. The only thing different is that everyone expects him to have been miraculously cured in the institution. After all, it was the kid's fault in the beginning. The kid is being set up for a failure.

For pre-institution cases—that is, kids who haven't run away several times—the possibilities range from formal probation to informal probation to just a stern lecture. The setting, though, is still involvement with the juvenile justice system with all the accompanying fears and feelings. The counselor is still a probation officer who has the muscle to lock a kid away until he turns 18-years-old.

As far as many kids are concerned, the initial counseling sessions have all the pressures of a nice set of thumb screws. Kids often see these sessions as being decidedly pro-parent though that is not often the case. Still, the sessions invariably end with the kid being coerced into going home by that silent threat of an institution lurking just under the surface.

Probation is the next best thing to an institution. The kid is still the recipient of all the pressures and guilt. If things don't work out at home, he is the one who gets sent up—not his folks. The inequality and the resentment nags at him every day.

The wrongs inherent in the system are painfully well known by Juvenile Court Services. That's why JCS gave its full backing to the hostel idea and to Focus. It's best for the kid, the family and the community—and that's what JCS and Focus are after.

When David's introspective eyes see three reasons which make a hostel mandatory:

"Number one, a record is made when a kid is booked as a runaway. The record follows him through life. For instance, I don't think he can get a job with the FBI if there is a juvenile record. There are many areas where a juvenile record has great bearing. And anybody who is really interested can manage to find out if a person has a juvenile record."

"Number two, in the juvenile detention center the kid is exposed to an element he just shouldn't be exposed to. There are some real honest-to-goodness law-breakers and, in some cases, savage kids. I see no reason why he should be exposed to anything like that."

"Number three, the pressure of institutionalization starts taking place. It doesn't take long and once you get a young person institutionalized, he is incapable of making any decision about his life. That's a

very bad place to put a person, and it's very hard to deal with him after that."

Director of Juvenile Court Services, James P. Carmany, has rounded up an additional, more legalistic, reason.

"I think the kind of shortcomings our juvenile court has are similar to the shortcomings the juvenile justice system has in the country. They are not specific at all to Las Vegas," he said. "The juvenile justice system, it seems to me, has been asked to become involved in cases which are crimes for children, but not really crimes at all. Specifically those are truancy, unmanageability or incorrigibility and the infamous running away from home. Basically, we're a court of law and what we see with this kind of child is a recognition of family problems which really don't need judicial decisions. What's needed is help for the family. The principal shortcoming, if it could be called that, is that the court in the past has been more of a social agency than a court."

"So one of our major thrusts within the last two years has been to divert children from our system, to keep children out of our system. That's the reason we went to Focus

and worked out the youth hostel approach to handling runaways."

"The hostel concept is a lot more viable and logical than having these kids held in our detention center where we're also holding kids who may be accused of armed robbery," "Why should we also be holding a kid whose only real problem is the fact he's having difficulty at home with mom and dad and is trying in some fashion to call attention to this problem."

"If the court is going to address itself to the kid who will some day become an adult criminal," "It's got to get out of being a family counseling agency or an agency which deals with children who can better be dealt with outside our system."

The "outside" for runaways, now, is Focus. A runaway doesn't have to stay at Focus. He doesn't have to call his parents. He doesn't have to listen to the counselors. He doesn't have to worry about an institution or anything tied in with the juvenile justice system. He doesn't have to cope with anything. If he wants to, he can leave by the back door of Focus right after walking (or being brought) in the front. He can do a lot of things besides take care of business—but he doesn't.

Credit the Focus concept, or whatever, but the kids coming to the hostel just don't run. Of the first

300 runaways at Focus, only three chose the streets as a more tolerable answer for themselves. For the kids who choose to stay at Focus, reality usually is going home. With someone to take the initial responsibility of reconciliation off their backs, most kids are relieved the road has ended . . . and not at a dead end.

The by-the-book system of dealing with runaways who somehow stumble into the clutches of a lawman is for them to be taken to Juvenile Court Services for processing. This entails filling out what is several miscellaneous scraps of paper. Of course if a kid happens to rate any additional charges—which could result if a knife or a cache of drugs found tucked away inside a bedroll—he will sit out the night in detention and talk the matter over with an intake probation officer the next morning. Additional charges could—but usually don't—mean a trip through Juvenile Court just like a regular local delinquent. These cases, fortunately, are a rarity. What usually happens with the simple runaway is that after the pile of paperwork is completed, the lawman gives him a ride to Focus and drops him off at the front door.

Focus Neighbors

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Focus is nestled in an old residential area. The county hospital is only a block away on one side and the District Health Department is a block away on the other. Catty-corner behind Focus is a smaller hospital originally built as a convalescent home. And right in the middle of all this is a residential island of homes established. Focus is in the most expensive house in the area and it would be a chore to find a building more centered.

Focus was asking for what is known as a Use Permit to allow "a quasi-public use, to wit: a Youth Advisory Agency known as Focus on property . . . at 1916 Goldring Avenue." That is merely the legal language to request that something other than a private home—but for the good of the public in general—be permitted in a residential area. In this particular case there was little above-board disagreement that a youth hostel would be a good thing to have around or that Focus would be the best organization to run it. It is not fashionable (or wise, if you're looking for favors) to talk

bad about kid organizations. The issue was whether the Focus hostel should be in Las Vegas itself or consigned to some out of way place in the desert.

The residents turned out in droves for the public hearing before the City of Las Vegas Board of Zoning Adjustment, but then, so did the Focus family.

A steady stream of Focus staffers, kids, board members, police and Juvenile Court officials swirled around the podium building an impressive case in favor of Focus. Hostile whisperings were obvious from the anti-hostel side of the auditorium.

Finally it was the residents' time to battle the kid crusaders. One by one they shuffled to plead their case before the five zoning board members. One man said he felt the hostel would be an intrusion on his property rights, would result in damage to surrounding homes and crowd the lane-and-a-half wide street. Another added it would only be a matter of time before someone was killed by a car because of the lack of sidewalks in the area. One woman pointed out there also were no street lights. Still another man argued the sewer line in that area wouldn't be big enough.

Somewhere in the proceedings, one of the residents slapped a petition before the commissioners with 64 signatures of people opposing the hostel in that area. One home owner declared the majority rules and the majority in this instance was against Focus.

His majority didn't. Four of the board members gave a thumbs-up to the hostel with the fifth abstaining.

The decision was appealed, of course, sending the issue before the City Commission.

The residents were through flitting around. They didn't want Focus in their neighborhood and it wasn't because the sewer lines might be a bit stuffy. They just didn't want a bunch of long-haired punk kids wandering around their castles. And on top of all that, they were mad because they didn't win a victory before the zoning board.

"We, the ignored, over-burdened taxpayers who have to support such organizations as Focus without any questions, were merely tolerated at the Board of Zoning Adjustment hearing," snapped the owner of the plush home on the east side of Focus. "The Use Permit question did not get into the mind of the mem-

bers of the board, but the impressive list of Focus trustees, advisors, etc.—consisting of hotel owners, judges, attorneys, etc.—did. Therefore the Use Permit was granted."

"Due to this," she threatened, "I have requested and received an appointment with the Nevada Attorney General regarding that meeting."

"We, not the 18-year-old voters, elected you to serve in good faith and to represent the majority of the taxpayers," the argument continued. "Truthfully, gentlemen, would you want Focus . . . located next door to you? All we desire is to live in our little area in peace. We do not wish to live in the environment Focus wishes to impose upon us."

Picking up the anti-hostel onslaught, another neighbor explained: "A lot of us chose this area to raise our children so they would not be exposed to—if you want to use the phrase—wayward children, children who are not disciplined at home, children who are searching, children who are testing dope. I have two children and Focus is just another place, in my opinion, for them to be exposed to that."

Another woman, who lives a block and a half from Focus, weighed her feelings and found Focus didn't fit on the scale. "I love



my home, I love my son and I love my privacy on my property," she said. "I love them more than I love Focus. We think Focus is a necessity but we do not want Focus in our area."

Still another area resident predicted, "if this permit is granted, this area would be destroyed. I guess that's what you could call it when people cannot sell their homes or are afraid to go out in their yards, or let their children play or come from school alone, unmolested by these young people who are possibly under the influence of narcotics."

Scotting at the arguments, Maurice Morgan, business manager of Juvenile Court Services gave the commissioners an irrefutable list of statistics to work with.

"As you and I get older," he observed, "we sometimes acquire certain ideas about younger people. And because we are concerned about crime and other problems, we sometimes blame the wrong people and get facts all mixed up with emotions. The facts are that during 1971, 87.9 percent of the

crimes of violence were committed by adults in Clark County. And 91.5 percent of the crimes against property were committed by adults. Our youth make up 38 percent of the population and yet are responsible for only 10 percent of the crimes, while the national average is more like 50 percent."

"And do not misunderstand me," he said, peering confidently through wire-rim glasses, "I do not worship at the Golden Calf of Youth, nor do I worship at the Golden Calf of any other age group. I'm trying to be as totally realistic about the problem of the kids in this community as I possibly can. There are a lot of kids in this community with problems, who are abused, battered, neglected, molested, ignored, that are living in homes where dissension is rampant. If you lived in some of those homes, you'd run away, too."

"Recently one of the supervisors at Juvenile Court estimated the children on his caseload talked with their parents about 20 minutes a day while spending five hours a day with their friends."

"The question before this community is simply this: Where will Focus operate? I think without seeming to be too critical, that it

is unfortunate Juvenile Court Services is so far removed from the heart of the community. It is unfortunate also that the correctional institutions for youth are 200 and 500 miles away from the kids' problems in Las Vegas. It's only another sign of how we like to hide our problems by pushing them behind our backs so we don't see them. The community of Las Vegas needs Focus in a good neighborhood, where adequate facilities can be close at hand and where young people can feel wanted, loved, cherished and not shoved off to another place. Hours and days of searching have been spent to find the right place, and 1916 Goldring Avenue is that place."

problem because of the hazards of the wood frame structure. I doubt very much whether the runaway hostel will ever become a fact. I don't expect to see the thing develop."

But it did.

After a couple of months of cutting doors and windows where there weren't any and after covering seemingly acres of wood paneling with a swimming pool of fire resistant paint, Focus opened. And it has stayed open every day since then.

The Focus family did its homework well, but then, so did the residents. Focus just had right in its corner. These two things are all it ever takes to win, but primarily the homework.

The most memorable toasty-warm feeling the Focus staff got after moving in was when one of its new neighbors—who was quivering behind bolted and alarm wired doors out of a mass slaying—dragged a garden hose from her yard to Focus when the runaway hostel was suffering plumbing difficulties.

... Plush, Classy ... Even Kind of Hip ...

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The Focus house is a sprawling, single-story ranch-style building. It was quite a few years ago and the time has been well used to almost hide it from the street in front with Italian cypress and Lombardy poplars in various stages of health. Gargantuan cottonwood trees on the sides and rear of the house keep the desert sun from ever scorching the vast lawn or the established roses and vines which have commandeered the surrounding grounds. The outside area is a bit tatty but that gives the runaways staying at Focus something to do besides sit shrug-shouldered in a corner whining about their moms and dads.

Inside the house is a bit surprising. It is plush, classy and all those things but is also remarkably warm and practical and even kind of hip. The main room has a red Spanish tile floor and is split-level the entire length. One side of the room holds a brick and copper barbecue with little ovens built in. Bread baking has become a revived art for some of the kids.

When the staff gets excited about something in the new house, everyone seems to get excited.

The kitchen is huge, befitting a house of this magnitude, and is more than capable of providing for the dozen or so runaways usually staying there at any given moment.

The kids cook.

The dining room is also mammoth but lacked the one necessary factor—a table big enough for a bunch of kids. Fortunately, though, talent has not bypassed Focus. A little scrounged wood and a lot of volunteer effort gave birth to a six by ten foot, inlaid patterned table. When David sometimes grumbles threats as he walks past that he is going to set up an electric railroad on the table to pass the food around. It has become one of those little house jokes.

The remainder of the house is pretty much the standard array of bedrooms and closets with notable exception of when David's office. A cryptic comment on when David's ideas of internal power, the office has no desk—only a square coffee table outlined with chairs. It's informality at its worst and equality at its best. Everyone in Las Vegas is very well aware Ray when David is the "Old Man" of Focus. He is the man on top of Focus.

He tried a desk in the beginning but quickly threw it out growling, "you can't get any work done sitting behind a desk." Ray works with people, not papers. He doesn't consider himself any better than the people sitting in the other chairs around the table which is probably

why most of those people consider him a few strides up the stairs of humanity. He'll call you a fool if you start talking that way.

Ray ben David is a bit unique in other ways for someone running a place to help kids. His credentials are simple: he shot heroin for 20 years, and then spent a few more after that in Synanon as an inmate and eventually as a staff member.

ben David still gives a lot of credit for his and Focus' success to Chuck Dederich, the founder and all powerful "old man" of Synanon. Dederich was ben David's inspiration. "Many times when I have a decision to make," ben David related, while fiddling with one of those unsuccessful cigarette holders designed to make a person loathe tobacco, "I will stop and think, 'How would the old man have done it?' I sit back and then say, 'Well, the old man would have done this.' And then I go along with it if it looks like it will fit our particular thing."

ben David is 50-years-old now and is plagued with perpetually puffy hands as a result of having far too many needles punching up his veins. He reminisces playfully with friends about his junkie days, like when he got loaded with and then ripped off Billie Holliday or when

he knew Lennie Bruce or when he would check himself into the federal narcotics rehabilitation hospitals just for a free vacation from the grizzly New York winters. It seems at times like this that he is telling of this other guy named Ray ben David. It's hard to picture this up-standing, efficient and personable director of a highly successful youth agency as the slick talking, cook-it-up-and-push-it-in-your-arm dope fiend he speaks about. When something isn't going right at Focus, ben David is always handy to smooth over the tension with a sly comment like, "Why is this happening to me—all I did was shoot dope for 20 years."

It's an inescapable part of him but a very ancient and very irrelevant part.

The relevant part is the Focus organization today.

As with every private agency destined to save humanity, Focus was born in a living room molasses thick with enthusiasm from a handful of compatriots rediscovering life.

One of those compatriots happened to be his wife of one year who sat through that year watching him do wonders with friends' kids having trouble getting their existences sorted out. Flora Dungan is her professional name (she is a more-than-prominent accountant along with being a University of

Nevada Regent and former State Assemblywoman). She met Ray at Synanon while she was working free to set up the bookkeeping system there.

They got married about the same time the bookkeeping chore was completed and became full time Las Vegas residents. "From the time Ray got into Las Vegas, he was busy with kids. After getting to know and trust Ray they just started dropping by to swim, or hang out or get down to some serious talking. For the first year, our house, in essence, was Focus."

Something contributing to the crowd was one of ben David's early jobs — talking in Clark County school classes about drugs and those type things. "He was so dynamic," the late Miss Dungan (or Mrs. ben David) used to recall. "That when we would go to a shopping center, kids would gather all around him. I would go off and do my shopping for an hour or so knowing when I returned he would still be there with the kids. From my many years in Las Vegas I was well aware of what was being done with and to our children in the schools and I didn't like it. I saw what Ray could do at Synanon and I knew the kids in Las Vegas needed what he could provide."

Many of his backers then make up the Board of Trustees now. It is an impressive sounding board, with such people as casino and bank presidents, but it's also a producing board. It could easily take a public bow for rounding up needed goods and cash to keep ben David plugging away at kids' problems, but it won't. In comparison with the boards of other service organizations, it is small—comprised of only nine members. But each is a dynamo.

Today's success of Focus was fantasized by the founding fathers and mothers in those early days of course, but being realists they understood the fragility inherent in do-gooder organizations. The run-away hostel, however, seemed to be destiny. For the three years prior to the hostel, there was never a day when someone wasn't sleeping in the moderately posh ben David home, whether it was just overnight or for weeks or months. One current Focus staffer lived with Ray and Flora more than a year.

"I think I had actually had a feeling that this whole thing was going to grow into what it has grown into," ben David said in retrospect, "but I never verbalized it, never articulated it."

"I never went out waving flags in the community saying I had been chosen to do this. I just felt it,"



he said, continuing to reveal little known parts of himself. "It seemed like it was the thing I was supposed to do."

But Ray ben David's past was his own first albatross. Several "top" law enforcement officials thought it would be a good idea if ben David left town. After all, an ex-junkie can't do anything with kids except turn them on to dope. But pulling the sword from the stone, the Focus organizers slew those dragon ideas and a few more from several other spirited citizens. "We stand decided," ben David bluntly stated, "kids with problems needed a place where they could go. We knew we were right and we weren't going to surrender."

As predicted, relations were a bit stained for a while but to the amazement of it's opponents, the Focus idea worked. The pattern for Focus came straight from Synanon—provide long term group interaction with positive peer influences to counteract the negative peer influences so easy to find in the community. The goal is to change the life styles of these youngsters so they have the guns to handle the pressures of their folks and the outside world.

"You don't just sit down and shake a finger at kids and tell them to stop using drugs," ben David scowled. "You don't show them

visual aids. I don't believe you preach at them. That's the conventional way of doing things. I brought what I learned from Chuck Dederich at Synanon—the thing about personal growth, responsibility for yourself, a positive life style. Those are the things we teach around Focus: coping with situations, coping under stress and not shooting dope or getting loaded."

Focus, however, is decidedly different than Synanon. The "games" (ben David pirated the name also) are tough, cutting through the justifications kids use to cover their illicit or unthinking actions, but the games are on a much lower scale than Synanon's. They have to be. "If a person gets in a Synanon game and gets 'beat up', which the person probably deserves or which is indicated in order to make the adjustment in the mind, nothing outside the group is going to change," ben David said, explaining 'beat up' is Synanon's tag for being verbally pounced on in a game. "I remember I used to get some pretty heavy games on me, where I was wiped out. But when the game was over and I went into the living room with the rest of the house people, everything was the same as before. No one shunned me."

Synanon's structure allows the residents to lick their game wounds

inside the secure fortress they never leave, but the Focus kids have to go home to the pressures of parents, school and non-Focus (and in some cases anti-Focus) friends.

"If a kid gets 'beat up' in a Focus game, I see that it's taken care of," Ben David pointed out. "If a kid gets leaned on, it's the job of the tribe (game) leader and some other people in the game to kind of settle him down. We tell him something like: 'When the others draw a picture of you as you are—as not very pretty—okay, that doesn't mean that's the way you have to stay. If you are not happy with the way you are the, fine, you can change it. We are attacking your behavior, not you'."

In the early days of Focus—the name piliered from a Stan Getz album—there were the traditional hand-to-mouth financial hassles. Income was strictly a donation issue for a couple of years, but that was okay because Focus' successful track record was gathering a lot of support from Juvenile Court officials, law enforcement, casino operators, government power-houses, and the community in general. The United Way (formerly the United Fund) now provides money each year for the drop-in and group sections of Focus but leaves the money matters of the runaway hostel to OYD. The dol-

lars are separate but the two areas are predictably symbiotic with many local runaways joining the Focus games on a regular basis and a few established Focus members aiding in the runaway counseling and housing chores. Everyone knew it would work that way.

The hostel would be rather hard pressed to give runaways much more than mattresses and sheets in a cramped old house if it weren't for a \$100,000 gift from Faye Petersen Johnson, a Las Vegas businesswoman, which made it possible to buy the Goldring Avenue home. She gave the check to Focus in memory of her deceased brother Murray Petersen and asked nothing in return. She did not want to walk into Focus and have everyone bow and scrape. She did not want editorials in the press singing of her generosity and civic mindedness. She did not even want to be identified publicly. She didn't want anything other than to help a collection of pitiful youngsters at a place called Focus in memory of her brother.

Mrs. Johnson would probably be a regular at Focus is she didn't feel people would be catering to her because of her gift. And that would destroy her reasons for giving it.

This is why the hostel and drop in center has been quietly renamed "Murray Petersen Focus House."

... A Shudder Producing Click ...

Although the wizardry of Focus occasionally fails to conjure up happily-ever-after solutions for local kids, the hassle of dealing with out-of-towners is much higher up the pain scale. Initially the impersonal nature of telephone sessions between a counselor and a kid and his folks gnaws at a youngster's stomach until he is almost incapable of talking. There is no eye contact, no body language to let the kid know how he is doing or what he can expect to happen. And there are a score of ways that a phrase, a sigh, or just silence can be interpreted. Usually there are negative reactions by both kids and parents and it is up to the counselors—who sit in on a third phone throughout all arbitration talks—to maintain the equilibrium.

Because of the skinny Focus budget, virtually every call is made collect. This offers a built-in ray of hope for a child if his parents accept the charges, but can also irritate festering feelings on the folks' part. In the large majority of cases,

though, mom and dad would ecstatically pay a hundredfold to hear the sound of their kid's voice.

Of course, when they are not like that they have been known to terminate a conversation they are not happy with—maybe because they are not looking so good—by providing a shudder-producing "click."

The worst problem, though, is brevity inherent in long distance phone calls.

Bob Stanovik, the mustachioed head of the runaway hostel staff, recalls a young, East Coast girl whom Las Vegas Police found sitting by a road crying. Her name was Carol. She ran away from her step-mother who dominated her father and demanded the youngster perform a number of irrational demands, from not looking out the window (she finally sewed the curtains together) to keeping the house in spic and span condition to not sewing patches on her clothes (the clothes were ripped off her when she disobeyed).

Carol ran away to California to escape into the home of her mother and step-father. He was, however, enjoying a life of beating up on his wife and when Carol stepped in once, out of sheer frustra-

tion, he took his pistol and shot at her. She ran out and somehow she got herself together enough to reach Las Vegas but then fell apart. The police took her to Focus.

The first telephone call to her father in hopes of heading back that way turned up an attitude of "Well, it's up to you. I really don't care what you do, but do something and let me know." Carol was hoping for a "Please come back, I miss you. I want you. We'll sit down and talk about the things that have happened and see what we can work out."

A hope-beyond-hope call to her step-mother froze Carol. Half-way through the talk her step-mother just hung up the phone, leaving the girl an isolated lump on the floor of a house in the middle of a desert city.

She told Stanovik all she wanted was to be in a place where somebody cared for her, where someone loved her and where she could, in turn, care for somebody. A basic, absurdly simple request, but for someone who has never had it, it is like asking for world peace.

Catholic Welfare gave her a prescription for a foster home in Las Vegas and, like Cinderella, she is



living happily ever after—except for a few scars.

But not all the runaways brought into Focus are the emotionally abused, psychologically battered victims of their parents' sociological shortcomings, although that is what they would all have the counselors believe. There are those kids who will do anything, manipulate frantically, to get the counselors or the lawmen or the Juvenile Court authorities on their side against their parents.

That's why the people at Focus are professionals. There are plenty of kids who would have everyone believe their folks are tyrants because they only forked over \$100 or so last week to buy clothes. Undeniably the kids are a little shrewder than that—they just seem that shallow.

Saundra Hellman came across a 13-year-old girl a short time back who was leading a Jeekyll and Hyde existence, and it was eating her up.

"She was heavily involved in drugs and sex but her parents were completely oblivious to this. They told me she was a good girl, made good grades in school and had no dates," Mrs. Hellman recalled. "The girl had a different image at school. She was known for being bad-tempered and a discipline problem."

"Talking to her friends and acquaintances at school," she said, demonstrating the thoroughness she was taught in the Sheriff's Department, "I learned when she was supposed to be babysitting she was really out with her boyfriend. She set up a system of good friends, which she took home and were accepted by her parents, and her bad friends, who she was primarily involved with socially."

But a 13-year-old can't absorb that kind of pressure very long and eventually she ran away to California. Her folks found her at an old friend's house and brought her back to Las Vegas, calling the Sheriff's Department when they arrived.

"I took the family to Focus but mom and dad wouldn't accept the negative things about the girl," Mrs. Hellman remembered. "They were overbearing and accepted the girl's word when she said she was good. Then one day mom found some of the girl's letters describing the things she was doing with boys and her involvement in drugs."

"Back everybody went to Focus and the girl and her parents spilled their guts. The girl said she felt her parents didn't care about her. Her folks were surprised, disgusted, hurt and guilt-ridden."

"They stuttered real well," Mrs. Hellman noted. "Then they came out with the old thing of 'You know we love you,' but she didn't know."

"At the end of the session, the work needed to be done was set out and everyone was happy. And the girl is now a regular member of Focus."

"Focus just works, that's all," she said.

But then again, sometimes Focus doesn't work and some of these times are when the staff wants it to work most of all.

Diane was one of those. She is just a grunt-and-shrug Las Vegas teenager who is the product of two alcoholic parents. She was having enough trouble changing from a girl to a woman but was compounding matters by straining to get her folks' life out of the bottle and into the light. Frequently, though, her Florence Nightingale ventures were met by a less-than-receptive audience. Her father, who insisted, when the Focus staff confronted him, that he had his drinking well under his thumb, was known to pick up Diane and fling her into a corner when he didn't agree with her altruistic tendencies. She got stuck with every bit of the housekeeping because mom and dad were whiling away their time at a bar.

As she grew older, the situation kept dragging her down more and more. She pleaded with her school counselor for help but when he tried to get the folks together for a family meeting, they shut the door on him. She tried another counselor but that try, too, was a failure. The situation left her with barely any semblance of a normal teenage life. She ran away and on the advice of a friend, ended up at Focus.

"I'm on the verge of committing suicide," she blurted out to the first counselor she saw. After she quit shaking, she said, "I really like my parents. I want to stay with them but at the same time I don't want to stay there because I just get pushed around."

She had been gone from home four days by this time and her parents had not yet filed a runaway report with the police.

Diane and a counselor called her parents, but when her mother answered the phone, it was obvious she had again been drinking heavily. Somewhere in the middle of her ramblings she dropped the phone and her father retrieved it. He, at least, was able to understand what Diane was saying. But he was less than sympathetic. "Where have

you been?" he questioned. "We've missed you for the last couple of days. Come on home. You belong here at home, you know that." Satisfied with that outburst, he dropped the phone in its cradle. Diane broke apart. She was scared. She wanted to call right back but decided that waiting until morning would be better. The next morning mom and dad were nursing bad heads, but at least were sober.

This was mother's turn to do the talking. "I want you home," she barked, picking up where her husband left off the night before. "I want you home right away. You know you have no business running away. You have to be in this house. There's a lot of things you're responsible for. We expect you to come home after school (she had been going every day since running away) tonight and that's that."

"No, mom, I've tried coping in that house and we can't get it on," Diane answered, probably showing much more fortitude than she ever had in the past. "Please come to Focus and let's talk." Her folks reluctantly agreed on a meeting that night.

As could have been predicted, they were almost falling on their faces when they arrived. A couple of Focus staffers finally had to usher mom back to the car, but every now and then she would drag herself out of the front seat and try to get back into Focus.

Diane, begging through her tears, told her father she needed his word they would try to do something about their drinking. He was quick to give it but when she asked what the game plan was, his answer was they would talk about it. Diane said that was tried before and obviously it didn't work. She demanded some definite measures. Another meeting was set up for the following night and Diane's folks drove away, leaving the girl behind sobbing.

They came back the next night and were, for the most part, clear-headed. For this meeting, however, there was one additional person—a representative from Alcoholics Anonymous. A lot of paper talking followed, but finally everyone got down to business and mom and dad finally admitted, reluctantly, they wanted a little help but didn't know how to go about it. Appointments were set up with AA and after many smiles and a few warm words, Diane left Focus with her parents.



Three days later Diane was back on the phone to Focus. Her folks had been drunk ever since that last counseling session. She finally decided to stick it out another week to see what would happen. Nothing did. Diane dragged them down to Focus again and they were confronted not only by the Focus staffer and the representative from AA, but also a Protective Services Officer from Juvenile Court and Diane's school counselor.

Mom and dad again vowed to take care of business, but dad still didn't think he had much of a problem and the cure was really up to his wife. Even since that night the performance record of Diane's parents has been spotty. They go on binges every few days but in between mom flits in and out of AA. It's just enough to bait Diane on. She is still hoping.

Focus' Bob Stanovik isn't so optimistic. "My guess is that more than likely it's going to blow up. Eventually Diane will go to Protective Services and get into a foster home."

"I think, in this particular case, the young person is the adult and the older people are the children," he said. "I guess what we're experiencing is a lot of young people running away from home not because they are nasty young people who have been doing something wrong, but because they are the only ones in the household who are sensitive enough to realize something is going wrong."

"These kids are crying, 'I don't think this is the way we should be living. We're not at all happy. Maybe we could be having a better family life. Something has to be done. I want to do something about it but I don't know where to go. I'm not sophisticated enough to know all the agencies around town. I'm going to run away. Hopefully someone will pick me up and I'll get help.' "

... More Than Just a Gut Reaction ...

The people who say the Focus runaway hostel is a flaming success, are sincere. They are also pros in the people business, which must mean something.

Considering the Focus hostel can not be awarded any higher title than crisis service—which is far from derogatory—only the counselees can say with the wisdom of Solomon if their experiences were successful.

Focus has a haphazard follow-up system for the youngsters and parents ho pass through Focus, and occasionally by each other. The follow-up consists of sending out questionnaires, but only after some time has passed to get something more than just a gut reaction. Some of the inquiries even come back. Those that do generally paint revealing portraits of the authors, ranging from amusing to shocking to heartbreaking.

These quotes are taken from several of the questionnaires returned by kids. None of the spelling or grammar was corrected, obviously.

"... I realize how stupid and immature it is to run away from others and find out it's really from yourself."

"If it wasn't for Focus, I would probably have never realized what an ass hole I was . . . I'm still screwed up but not as bad."

"... I want to be part of Vocus..."

"Even tho I was there just a short time I felt that somebody really cared for me there . . . it is the best place I have ever went to."

"Have not missed any school since I got home."

"It is definitely better than sitting in juvenile hall."

"My parents took me out of school even though I brought all my grades from F's and D's to C's and B's. I've been grounded and my drivers license has been taken away ever since I came back."

"Before I ran away my parents trusted me. Now I have to start that trust all over again."

"... I was hurting a lot of people and thinking only of myself, not about the people around me . . . I think you helped me a lot and if the same situation occurred again I'd come back."

"... the counselors kept bugging me about running away. All I really needed was some time to think about my problem."

"... Nothing has changed from when I left..."

A San Jose, California girl received a questionnaire just about the time her home life splattered up against the wall and the correspondence was a needed opportunity to reach out . . . to shoot a flare . . . to wave a flag.

The first emotion-oriented question on the questionnaire is: "What do you feel has changed in your situation?"

The girl answered:

"Nothing. You see I got caught for cutting [school] and so they said I couldn't see Mark. Now I am really lost. I can't have them make me break up with Mark. Please, oh please Help Me!!"

A letter written on that blue lined loose leaf paper everyone buys for school was tacked to the questionnaire, reading:

"Well everything happened. We cut about a week after we got home and we got caught. I did not care really but she took the belt and started beating on me. I have all these marks on me but the hell she could care less. Nothing will change now . . ."

The Focus counselor who had worked with her whipped off a quick note referring her to Huckleberry House in San Francisco, a Focus-like runaway facility catering to Bay Area kids.

Another questionnaire from a girl in South Dakota read, in part:

"I'm more grown up . . . I've learned that they [my parents] are people who really care and I can now love people without fear of rebuttal. You are all very loving, caring people and that is what is needed most of all."

The questionnaire was sent in by the girl's mother who wrote this note on the back:

"We received these forms on Saturday and Rhonda filled her's out the next day. Then Monday





morning she and three other girls left. They took quite a few things. Rhonda took a couple changes of clothes and her Bible. She left us a note saying she wants to be complete; free for a while and wants to live while she can. We had thought things were working out better. Her grades, etc., were much better and she wasn't so moody any more. Her dad and her were talking more and so were her and I don't have any idea where they went but I think she took more knowledge and God with her. I feel you helped her. But somewhere along the road she hasn't found what she thinks she is. She said in her note she would either send for her things or come after them. So I pray she will call real soon."

Many other parents sent lengthy replies to Focus. While the questionnaires to the youngsters were broken up into several categories, the follow-up sheet to their folks was based on the question: "Have there been any changes regarding the difficulty you and your son or daughter were having?" Some of the (also unedited) replies were:

"David has now joined the Air Force. He has been in for a week and when he called he seemed very happy. He said you were very kind to him. I hope there is a Focus center in every city."

"We have talked and we realize that Joy was only trying in the best way she knew to understand us and herself . . . her attitude has really changed for the better."

"We greatly appreciate the help the Focus staff provided to Don and us which united us as a family again."

"Communication between us isn't good. He quit high school and is working part-time. He does not intend to assume any responsibility . . . he refuses to eat his meals with us . . ."

"Yes, all is O.K. . . . he's in the Navy."

"She wants to loaf around with other teenagers—most of whom are of questionable character."

"We seem to be able to communicate quite a bit better and he seems to see things in a little more mature way. I do believe the few days he spent at Focus helped him to understand himself and also our views a little more clearly."

"Fred has been very good since he came home. He got good passing grades at the semester end and is getting very good grades now."

"My son is traveling in Florida but maintains communication with us at least twice weekly."

"He has gone to live with his grandmother and in so far as I know, he's doing all right."



"Have discovered that a tightened 'security' is absolutely necessary for her emotional as well as physical being."

"Instead of quarreling we discuss and compromise. We better understand his difficulties."

"We were very unhappy when he told us how he was treated until he arrived at Focus. I do not think any child who has written permission to be away from home needs to be handcuffed and treated rudely."

". . . Our Linda seems to have gotten her thing together. We only have Focus to thank. Her change has been incredible. She is back in school doing excellent work. She is being very helpful at home. Her ideas seem to have changed after her stay at Focus. If you could only see the change in our daughter you would see the good you are doing. The only disturbing thought we have is that Focus is not more widespread."

One of the questions the kids got stuck with was: "How would you like Focus to change or expand to make it better for other young people and their families?" Some of their answers included such gems as:

"I don't think it should change at all. It's all right the way it is."

"I think you're doing pretty fine as is."

"To enlarge Focus into more states than Nevada but otherwise it couldn't be better."

"To expand to places all over the United States in large and medium sized towns."

"You should have bigger house and more counselor so you can take more kids in."

"I think if people could find Focus before they ran away it would be better . . . so if there was a Focus in L.A. people could go there like the drop-ins do in Las Vegas."

"None at the moment but if I think of anything I won't hesitate to write you."

"Try to bring the parents and kids together through Focus instead of just returning kids to their parents."

"I would like Focus to have a place in every state."

"Probably need a bigger house or at least bigger bedrooms . . ."

Without a doubt, the most interesting, not to mention self serving, reply was from a young girl who got picked up along with her boy-husband for being runaways.

Her suggestion was:

". . . You really should let husband and wife SLEEP TOGETHER. That's all. Otherwise it's great."

Small Town Atmosphere . . .

26/37

Even though Focus has established itself strongly in the community, some local police officers still pose a problem every now and then. Some are a bit reluctant to admit one of those "do-gooder" agencies full of nothing but is better than a trip to Court and maybe a short term in detention. It is not true of all the lawmen in Las Vegas, decidedly. But it is true of enough to provide an occasional hassle. Not that these representatives of the law enforcement agencies are completely without provocation — in their minds, at least.

Actually, what this means is that a lot of people have to spend long hours straightening out wild stories, unfounded rumors and out-and-out lies.

Lt John McCarthy, Chief of the Las Vegas Police Department's Juvenile Division, is quick to point out the strained relations and is readily vocal with his feelings.

"Unfortunately our Patrol Division's uniform officers don't entertain the same philosophy the Juvenile Division does toward runaways," the former Narcotics Division head observed. "It's characteristic of all police. They tend to be

more punitive-oriented than people in specialized areas, such as parole or juvenile probation."

"Often the Focus hostel is regarded as a Disneyland situation where the kids are just slapped on the hands and sent back home to the parents. Actually we view it as a humanistic situation where they try to bring families together. And in instances where children or families call with drug problems, most of these are referred to Focus."

But not even McCarthy's Bureau is unanimously united in favor of Focus. McCarthy admits there have not been any complaints from citizens or neighbors against Focus, but there have been grumblings from Patrol Officers and "a couple of people from my own Bureau" linking Focus and the smell of marijuana, not to mention sexual promiscuity.

The odds a lawman would pass up the chance to nail a bunch of kids smoking grass on the Focus lawn are insanely high.

"A couple of police men will spread something like this around the community," Ben David said with a faint note of irritation in his voice, "and then I have to go out and put some energy into doing something about it, which I have

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done. But, for the most part, that doesn't happen. We get pretty good response from the police."

The problems aren't with the administration-level people in any of the agencies, but from the lower-level people.

Even Las Vegas Mayor Oran Gragson, stated, "Focus is serving a need in the community and is doing a very outstanding job."

The Mayor also pointed out "the city has had no problems with Focus since the first week it moved into its new house. And the only problem we had was a minor one because the youngsters at Focus didn't know whose property was whose. We asked Focus to tell the youngsters to stay off the private property adjoining Focus. They did, and there have been no complaints since then."

City Commissioner Hank Thornley, expounded, "we're very much behind Focus. We're extremely proud of the accomplishments thus far. We have already experienced the results of the efforts being made through this project. We would like to, in any way we can, contribute support to expanding this into other areas and other cities. We'd be most happy to lend our energies in this direction."



Lt. McCarthy backs up Thornley's confidence with an off-the-wall evaluation indicating the growing value of the runaway hostel to law enforcement.

"The percentage of kids we deal with who subsequently become constant or habitual runaways seems to have diminished to a considerable extent now that we have been utilizing Focus," he pointed out. "They maintain an open-door policy there, so if a child finds tensions are building in the home, he can go down there and talk things out. He can get some direction. Previously, the only thing he had was the influence of his friends, the encouragement from them to run away, the offer of shelter."

"Focus tries to teach the kids to deal with problems rather than just run away."

Sandra Hellman, a stunning, six-foot-tall, showgirlish woman who works for the Juvenile Division of the Clark County Sheriff's Office, has tagged Focus, "probably the most important aspect of our dealings with runaways." But then, she isn't really a cop, she is the Youth Counselor, which means she has a badge, but no gun. Her job is a newly-created one putting her in the pleasingly-compromising position of being able to work with kids for what is best, like Focus, while still representing the Sheriff's Of-

fice. It's rather out of context for a cop, but the job is working out more effectively than traditional "book-em-all" lawmen would like to believe.

"If parents don't like the idea of Focus, we try to talk them into going to Focus and talking with the counselors there," she said. "Many times, kids will respond favorably to the Focus idea but parents won't. Once they agree, we prepare them for what they are going to see. We explain it's a big, impressive house and has Federal funding behind it. We also tell them there will be other teenagers who are their child's peers—some with long hair—walking around and interacting with each other. We explain the Focus concept and give the parents a run-down on the counselors, some of whom also have long hair."

The staff—because the average age is in the early 20's has become a hindrance to itself in dealings with some lawmen and a variety of parents. The issue whittled down to whether the staff was going to be working with kids or catering to police and parents. Be aware, Focus is still operating at its peak.

One officer, however, found that peak was a little low the day he got there.

"One patrolman said he took a girl down to Focus and when he went through the front door there was nobody to greet them," McCarthy said, agreeing with his comrade. "There was no one to show them where to go. You couldn't tell the players without a score card because the staff so closely resembles the kids. The officer looked and looked and finally located a staff member."

"This complaint was forwarded to Focus. Hopefully there will be some method of identification so an officer can go in there and immediately identify one of the supervisory personnel," McCarthy concluded. "Hopefully something will be changed."

It has been, but not by any little badge or tattooed "F" on the forehead. The counselors and the kids got wired up by ben David to give a fast glad hand to anyone shuffling through the heavy front door of the house.

"And now things are going so smoothly, we're even getting referrals from the FBI," ben David noted. "Some agents were at the bus station one night and found four kids wandering around. They asked what was going on and the kids told them they didn't have a place to go.

The agents brought the kids to Focus, but I don't think they acted as FBI people. I think they just acted as responsible citizens. I don't know if Focus is officially an FBI resource."

"The immigration Service has also been using us," he added triumphantly. "Rather than take the kids they are going to deport to Juvenile Court, as had been done, they bring them here now. Then they come back a day or two later, pick them up and put them on the plane. They still do that part, but maybe one day we'll do that."

"The point is that they are starting to refer to us, and that's good. I can't see it not happening in the future. I can't see Focus not growing," he added. "In terms of handling children, there is no way it should be in the hands of the police unless they have broken some law; unless they have gone out and committed a crime against some person or property. If it's strictly a case of runaway, Hell, we should be handling that. And Focus can do it. No—change that—we have done it. We've handled quite a lot of kids since our inception."

These mellowing relations between Focus and the law enforcement agencies, however, didn't grow without the watering can being tipped on both sides. Just like Focus uses positive peer influence



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to keep kids from using drugs, Foxy Sandy Hellman and Lieutenant McCarthy are applying pressure to their peers to accept Focus.

"We try to encourage officers to at least drop by Focus, say hello and have a cup of coffee. It works both ways. The officer learns a new approach to dealing with a particular kind of kid and his presence there works to de-sensitize youngsters normally hostile to officers," McCarthy said. "I know several patrol officers who have taken it upon themselves to go down to Focus, even when they are off duty, and ask about the programs or just visit and rap with some of the kids. Some of the officers go down there as a follow-up on their own to see what happened to particular kids they took there. From these particular officers we get good feedback about Focus."

Undoubtedly that impression was dialed in a bit by Ben David, who is focusing a lot of energy to "stop the war."

"I haven't seen a mass exodus from Focus because lawmen are dropping in now. I haven't heard anybody bitching about it, saying 'what are the pigs doing here?'

What I want to do is stop the war," said Ben David, who spent scores of hours in his junkie days talking bad about "the man."

"For example," he continued, "the word 'pigs.' If a kid uses the word pig around here he gets a 'pull-up' which is when someone says, 'Hey, don't do that.' The word pigs is not used around here simply because we want to stop the war."

"There is still a war going," the silver-haired director hastily pointed out. "Police versus citizens. It shouldn't be that way. They are here to do a job for us. They are the servants of the people. It says on the car, 'To Protect and To Serve.' It doesn't mean to be at war with them or them with us and I think our young people have got to get that message."

\$98,000 Savings

James P. Carmany is a virtuoso as Director of Clark County Juvenile Court Services. He is not the "old man" in the same manner of speaking as Ray Ben David or Chuck Dederich, but has magic fingers when it comes to playing his staff.

He wanted the runaway hostel more than almost anyone, not because it would take a few pounds off the backs of his staff—which it would, and does—but because of

the greater, overall wish to fix kids right the first time. Twenty-seven percent of the boys and girls on probation previously had been given a helping hand under the Protective Services Division (abandoned, neglected, abused kids) of Juvenile Court Services. A lump of that twenty-seven percent was runaways.

"Our local runaway problem has continued to increase within the last five years to the point that last year we had a total of 583 children referred as local runaways," Carmany said. "As of last March Focus had handled a total of 304 local runaways (remember, Focus didn't start taking runaways in until October, 1972). At the rate we're now going, it would appear that by the end of the year, our local runaways coming into Juvenile Court will be reduced by more than fifty percent. The projection is that 275 or 280 kids will be coming into the Courts as runaways by the end of the fiscal year, 1972-73. This means a reduction from last year of about 300 kids and it's my position and generally the position of the Court that these kids are going to receive better treatment from a private agency than they will by getting locked into the Juvenile Justice System."

"We're realizing a savings to the taxpayers of Clark County," he continued. "Our figures indicate it costs us about \$54 a child if all we do is warn and release him at the Intake stage. If we process runaways through the Court process and they either go on formal or informal Probation, we figure the costs then increase to about \$870 per year per child (a year is about average for Probation). If we take the 300-plus reduction from last year, or the 304 kids Focus has already worked with, and figure about 200 of these children would be handled at Intake, this represents a savings of some \$11,000 to the Court. Our statistics indicate about one-third of these children would go on and be processed through the Court, then we are talking about an additional savings of about \$87,000. So the dollar impact through Focus amounts to about \$98,000, or just \$2,000 on the lean side of Focus' total OYD grant."

"What we've seen in Las Vegas as far as the kind of impact Focus has had is generally the same as in any other part of the country. That is, people are beginning to realize that peer influence guided by somebody with professional ethics probably has more impact on certain problems like drugs or alcohol, than any traditional agency ap-



proach that we have had," Carmany added. "Focus is helping us in the professional community realize some of the traditional treatment methods are not too successful. We have known that, but to see a group be so successful further demonstrates that to us."

"And it seems to me it's certainly a less costly method than many of the traditional psychiatric approaches," he said.

Carmany candidly, and unremorsefully, recommends this country's other cities establish their own Focus-like hostels.

"I don't see any reason why they couldn't," he said. "The nation is beginning to pay attention to the whole issue of children traveling or running away or whatever term you wish to use. It's probably one of the biggest problems facing the country today as far as kids are concerned. They are middle class and upper middle class kids on the move. Some of the problems they get into are the results of traveling with limited funds and not having the kinds of places in the community they can get to."

"The experience we've had with Focus would indicate it does work and it doesn't cause a lot of problems for the community. We haven't seen the neighborhood burglarized. We haven't seen a lot of vandalism in the neighborhood. Focus doesn't exist in the ghetto of the city. It exists in a very nice neighborhood in our city and there aren't the kind of problems that people suspected we would have."

Focus has proven its type of set-up works.

Ray ben David received a letter not too long ago. It read in part:

"You may recall I mentioned . . . last year that yours would be a difficult job. I am pleased to see that you and your excellent staff have overcome numerous obstacles and have put together a program which offers many important services to our young people."

"I am particularly pleased that Nevada was among the first states to originate this concept. It is my hope that other states will emulate the success of Focus."

"You have my best wishes for continued success."

The signature read simply, "Mike."

It was from Michael O'Callaghan, Governor of the State of Nevada.

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